
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District: **Kingman Park Historic District** (x) Agenda
Address: **Kingman Park Triangle Park**
(21st Street, Oklahoma Avenue and D Street NE)

Meeting Date: February 24, 2022 () Addition
Case Number: 21-435 (x) Concept

The applicant, Friends of Kingman Park (FOKP), returns to the Board for the third time for review of a public art installation titled *Swept Yard* for the triangle park at 21st Street, Oklahoma Avenue and D Street NE in the Kingman Park Historic District. The applicants have been awarded a grant from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities (CAH) for the installation to include an arrangement of seating and an artistic component related to the history of the neighborhood.

At its first review in July 2021, HPO and the Board approved the proposed art installation in concept but requested revisions to make the proposed installation more compatible with the character of Kingman Park and its physical context. The triangle park is a simple, open space, and like the unfenced front yards of the houses, allows for views over and through it. The Board thus requested that revisions be made to reduce the scope and scale of the installation, particularly in terms of the number and height of the historical panels and the entry portal, and that the installation be better “grounded” on the site and that future maintenance be considered.

Based upon comments from the Board, the applicants returned with a revised plan in December 2021. This revised plan eliminated the entry arch in the original scheme, reduced the height of the benches, and re-designed the historical “portals” as narrative “thresholds.” It presented a sinuous, amoeba-shaped line of benches arranged in three different heights and configurations, interspersed by narrative thresholds, flush with the ground. The arrangement of benches, which essentially wrapped itself around the center of the park with the Kingman Park marquee sign in the middle, was set within a bed of pea gravel with an edge which followed the curving arrangement of the benches.

The Board found that the revised plan, with the elimination of the entry arch and the conversion of the historical portals to thresholds, was much improved and in keeping with the low-scale and open character of the historic district. The Board felt that the curved path of pea gravel with its edge better grounded the artwork to the site and allowed for easier maintenance of the grounds surrounding the artwork. The Board again approved the project in concept. However, the Board wanted to better understand the nature, content and materials of the historical thresholds and noted that the content of the thresholds could be enriched by input from longtime residents and other members of the community. To that end, the Board requested that the applicants (FOKP)

and the Kingman Park Civic Association (KPC) collaborate on the content of the historical component of the installation.

In addition to HPRB, and as part of the review process required by the DC Commission of Arts and Humanities (CAH), the applicants presented the proposed art installation to DDOT's Public Space Committee and its Urban Forest Division (UFD) and to the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA). The Public Space Committee approved the proposal with the condition that the final plans match those approved by HPRB; that final approval for the plans be obtained by UFD; and that the applicants file a Covenant of Maintenance Agreement for the installation. The Commission of Fine Arts expressed support and enthusiasm for the design and approved the project, delegating final review to CFA staff.

Since the December HPRB hearing and the January CFA meeting, the applicants have been working closely with UFD, HPO and CFA, separately and in concert. The applicants reached out to KPCA to engage with them on the content of the historical thresholds with no success. In a letter to HPO and in email exchanges between HPO, KPCA and FOKP (all included for the Board's review), KPCA made it clear that it opposed the proposed installation *in toto* making any opportunity for collaboration difficult. It suggested that before such collaboration could occur, KPCA would require that all components be removed from the proposed project, along with existing elements in the park (the metal benches, the panda and the Kingman Park marquee sign) as well as existing trees. It recommended the installation of a bronze marker in the park describing the history of Kingman Park, as told by KPCA.

The applicants have presented a revised scheme that responds to comments from all entities. The design eliminates the existing benches (in deteriorated condition), proposes a location for a future metal sign to describe the history of the neighborhood, proposes the relocation of the panda sculpture and a potential future removal of the Kingman Park marquee sign, all suggestions of KPCA. The new plan presents a newly aligned and curving path specifically designed to avoid the critical root zones of the trees, developed in conversation with UFD. The path was also pushed easterly so that the edge of the path would align with the sidewalk along Oklahoma Avenue to allow for greater accessibility from people of all abilities, including those in wheelchairs, in response to comments by both CFA and HPRB. The thresholds and seating components, all of steel construction and arranged along the curving path, have been re-designed and the historical thresholds (now called community planks) have been further defined. As revised, the curving path is buttressed at either end by steel "porch" components leaving a broad opening towards the neighborhood to the north/northeast. The porches—actually tiered seating areas—face towards each other another to embrace the opening and to allow for communal viewing of events, meetings or other activities. The other components, strung along and within the path between these end porches, provide for a variety of seating and play opportunities. The community planks, of metal and installed at-grade, will be incised with memories, images, words, and other items related to the history of the neighborhood as captured by the residents themselves through organized events and activities.

Evaluation

The revised scheme provides an interactive kit of parts that will open the park up to community activity and engagement and that will be wheelchair accessible. The plan—with its tallest element rising 42 inches in height—retains a low-scale quality that is in keeping with the open character of Kingman Park. The pea gravel bed helps to ground the installation on the site as

before, while also allowing for ready maintenance of the park grounds without hurting the artwork within the edged pathway. Production of the community planks will engage the community on the neighborhood's history and will provide a tactile and artistic representation of the residents' memories and interpretations of that history. These community planks are not intended to tell the history of the neighborhood in a direct way; however, the plan does suggest a possibility for future signage that could do so more directly.

Recommendation

HPO finds that the revised scheme is compatible with the character of Kingman Park and meets the Kingman Park Historic District Design Guidelines. HPO recommends that the Board approve the project and that any further review be delegated to staff.